

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-10 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SCS-03

SCA-01 SY-05 A-01 OPR-02 CAB-02 COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-07

FAA-00 AID-05 DHA-02 /107 W  
----- 103171

O 191810Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4862

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E.O. 11652: N/A DECON 31 DEC 1977

TAGS: PBOR PFOR EAIR BGEN CASC MR SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: SECURITY OF HUGHES AIR WEST PERSONNEL

REF: A. STATE 29731# B. NOUAKCHOTT 2607

1. HOUR AND HALF AFTER HUGHES AIR WEST TEAM CHIEF PITTS  
HANDED LETTER AND TEXT OF ALTMAN MESSAGE TO DIRECTOR  
GENERAL AIR MAURITANIE (AIRM), I WAS SUMMONED BY ACTING  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS (AND MINSTATE  
NATIONAL ECONOMY) SIDI 'ABDALLAHI. MINISTER APOLOGIZED  
FOR KEEPING ME WAITING BRIEFLY, EXPLAINING HE HAD BEEN  
ON TELEPHONE WITH PRESIDENT. THEN COMING IMMEDIATELY  
TO POINT, SIDI STATED HE HAD BEEN INFORMED BY MINISTER  
OF TRANSPORT THAT STATE DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY HAD  
INSTRUCTED HAW PERSONNEL TO REFRAIN FROM TRAVELING TO  
NORTH. MINISTER EXPRESSED SHARP REGRET; NOTED MAURITANIA  
IS TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON HUGHES MAINTENANCE ASSISTANCE;  
ASSERTED NORTH IS NOW CALM AND PRESENTS NO  
DANGER TO PERSONNEL; STATED REGULARLY SCHEDULED  
INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS ARE OPERATING COMPLETELY  
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NORMALLY THROUGHOUT COUNTRY; AND DECLARED GIRM

WOULD IMMEDIATELY STAND DOWN ANY AIRM FLIGHT OR OFFLOAD ANY CIVILIANS ON FLIGHT BY MILITARY OR REQUISITIONED AIRCRAFT AT VERY FIRST HINT OF ANY REAL DANGER. MINISTER EXPRESSED HOPE WE WOULD RECONSIDER OUR ACTION. IN SUPPORT OF HIS REQUEST, SIDI LAUNCHED INTO MOST DETAILED EXPLANATION/JUSTIFICATION FOR GIRM SAHARA POLICY ANYONE HAS VOLUNTEERED TO DATE COUPLED WITH DETAILED RECAP OF DEVELOPMENTS ALONG NORTHERN FRONTIER DURING PAST TWO WEEKS (REPORTED SEPTTEL). SIDI CONCLUDED BY OFFERING TO SEND ME UP TO NOUADHIBOU TO SEE FOR MYSELF THAT ALL WAS CALM. (FRENCH AMBASSADOR WHO SPENT ALL DAY DECEMBER 18 IN NOUADHIBOU WITHOUT HEARING A SINGLE SHOT CONFIRMS THAT MINISTER'S INSISTENCE THAT DANGER IS PAST WAS ACCURATE AT LEAST FOR THAT 12 HOUR PERIOD.)

2. IN RESPONSE, I DECLARED CATEGORICALLY THAT DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY HAD FUNCTIONED ONLY AS MAIL CLERKS, THAT USG HAD TAKEN NO OFFICIAL POSITION IN HUGHES MATTER BEYOND EXPRESSING NORMAL CONCERN FOR SAFETY OF AMCITS. HANDED SIDI TEXT OF ALTMAN MESSAGE TO DOCUMENT MY ASSERTION. I OBSERVED THAT IT SEEMED SENIOR HAW EXECUTIVES WERE CLEARLY AND JUSTIFIABLY CONCERNED ABOUT SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF THEIR STAFF HERE, AND HAD ACTED IN UNDERSTANDABLE FASHION. I SUGGESTED THAT HAW WAS IN ALL PROBABILITY EQUALLY CONCERNED ABOUT LEGAL LIABILITY OF COMPANY SHOULD ONE OF ITS EMPLOYEES BE INJURED OR KILLED WHILE TRAVELING OR WORKING IN THE NORTH, AND NOTED THAT FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF COMPANY'S RESPONSIBILITY COULDBE ENORMOUS. I POINTED OUT AND UNDERScoreD THE FACT THAT LIABILITY PROBLEM IS COMPLICATED MANY TIMES OVER BY FACT THAT PRESENT CONTRACT BETWEEN HAW AND AIRM COVERS ONLY PROVISION OF MAINTENANCE SERVICE TO CIVILIAN AIRLINE OPERATING REGULAR SCHEDULE OF PASSENGER AND FREIGHT FLIGHTS IN CONTEXT NORMAL CIVIL AVIATION ACTIVITIES. HAW AND AIRM CONTRACT CLEARLY DOES NOT COVER CURRENT QUASI-MILITARY OPERATIONS NOR DESPATCH OF HAW PERSONNEL INTO DANGER ZONES. ASSERTING HAW HAD ABUNDANTLY DEMONSTRATED ITS GOOD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FAITH PERFORMANCE OF ITS CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS, I NOTED HUGHES TEAM HAD (A) DISREGARDED COMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF CONVERSATION CIVILIAN AIRLINE TO MILITARY AIR CARRIER; (B) BEEN WORKING AROUND CLOCK EVERY DAY FOR PAST TWO WEEKS TO KEEP AIRM PLANES FLYING; AND (C) IS PREPARED TO CONTINUE FUNCTIONING AT FULLEST POSSIBLE CAPACITY IN NOUAKCHOTT. CONCLUDING, I STATED USG HAD NO POWER TO ORDER

ANY PRIVATE AMERICAN COMPANY TO DO ANYTHING,  
AND CERTAINLY NOT TO ORDER US FIRM TO SEND ITS  
PEOPLE INTO WAR ZONE. I FURTHER DECLARED PROBLEM  
WAS ONE OF CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
TWO PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS, AND CONCERNED ONLY  
THEM. BUT RECOGNIZING SERIOUSNESS OF PROBLEM,  
I SUGGESTED SOLUTION WAS FOR TWO PRIVATE ENTITIES,  
HAW AND AIRM, TO WORK OUT SUPPLEMENTARY OR NEW  
ARRANGEMENT TO COVER NEW SITUATION.

3. SIDI EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR CLARIFICATION  
OF ROLE OF DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY. HE RECOGNIZED  
VALIDITY OF JUDGMENT THAT PROBLEM INVOLVED CON-  
TRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO PRIVATE FIRMS  
WHEREIN ONE PARTY ASSERTS THERE HAS BEEN BASIC  
CHANGE IN CONDITIONS SURROUNDING CONTRACT. NEVERTHELESS,  
HE INSISTED CONTEXT INEVITABLY INVOLVES BOTH  
GOVERNMENTS, AND REQUESTED EMBASSY AND USG TO INTER-  
VENE IN SITUATION IN SEARCH OF SOLUTION. SIDI  
WARMLY ACKNOWLEDGED HUGHES HAD BEEN WORKING WELL  
ABOVE AND BEYOND CALL OF CONTRACT TO KEEP  
MAURITANIAN PLANES FLYING.

5. WELL BEFORE ONSET RECENT CRISIS, UNSATISFACTORY  
HAW/AIRM RELATIONSHIP AND DETERIORATING OPERATIONAL  
COMPETENCE OF AIRM HAVE CRIED OUT FOR ON-SPOT  
INTERVENTION BY SENIOR HUGHES MANAGEMENT (OPERATIONS)  
EXECUTIVE. REPEATEDLY SCHEDULED VISITS BY VP ALTMAN  
HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY CANCELLED BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 1  
DOWN TO DECEMBER 10. NEED FOR THOROUGH OVERHAUL OF HAW/  
AIRM CONTRACT WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY MORE CRITICAL  
AS AIRM OPERATIONS GROUND DOWN AT INCREASING AND WORRISOME  
RATE. SPECTRE OF SERIOUS AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT DUE TO  
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PILOT INCOMPETENCE OR MAINTENANCE INADEQUANCY LOOMED  
EVER LARGER. AND GIVEN CIVIL AVIATION ENVIRONMENT HERE,  
HUGHES WILL INEVITABLY BE BLAMED WHOEVER MAY IN FACT  
BE AT FAULT, A POINT WHICH I MADE IN STRONGEST  
POSSIBLE TERMS TO VISITING HAW MAINTENANCE VICE  
PRESIDENT LAST WEEK NOVEMBER. (HUGHES SIMPLY  
DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT MEN HERE TO PROVIDE MANHOURS  
REQUIRED NOR ADEQUATE PHYSICAL FACILITIES TO ASSURE FULLY  
SATISFACTORY MAINTENANCE PROFILE OF AIRM FLEET, AND  
HAS SO FAR NOT TAKEN EFFECTIVE ACTION TO PUT AIRM  
ON NOTICE OF THIS FACT.) INTRODUCTION OF SAHARA  
FRONTIER COMPLICATION IN ADDITION TO EXISTING  
PROBLEMS MAKES ASAP VISIT OF HUGHES SENIOR EXECUTIVE  
IMPERATIVE. REQUEST DEPARTMENT URGE HAW DESPATCH SENIOR  
REP WITH FULL DECISION MAKING AUTHORITY TO NOUAKCHOTT

SOONEST.HANDYSIDE

NOTE BY OC/T: # STATETEL NOT IDENTIFIED

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** PHYSICAL SECURITY, CITIZEN PROTECTION, SUPPLEMENTAL AIRLINES, AIR ROUTES  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 19 DEC 1975  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** greeneet  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Executive Order:** N/A  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Office:** ACTION AF  
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**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
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**Previous Classification:** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** 75 NOUAKCHOTT 2607  
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**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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